

## 5. From Mobilized to Autonomous Voting

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シリーズタイトル(英 )	Occasional Papers Series
シリーズ番号	41
journal or publication title	Electoral Volatility in Turkey - Cleavages vs. the Economy
page range	47-58
year	2007
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2344/00010601">http://hdl.handle.net/2344/00010601</a>

# 5

## From Mobilized to Autonomous Voting

This chapter lays the ground for the main arguments by scrutinizing the nature of electoral participation in Turkey. The concept of electoral volatility implicitly assumes that voters cast ballots of their own will, autonomously. In the rural areas of Turkey, however, “mobilized” voting was traditionally prevalent, according to Nuhurat (1971) and Özbudun (1976).<sup>1</sup> Mobilized voting, as explicitly phrased by Özbudun for Turkey, refers to either induced or deferential voting for local notables. For the interpretation of electoral volatility, therefore, it is very important to determine whether voting is relatively autonomous or mobilized. Large electoral volatility under autonomous voting implies weak voter loyalty (or trust) toward political parties. Under mobilized voting, on the other hand, electoral volatility does not reflect party loyalty to a great degree. In practice, voting behavior involves both autonomous and mobilized motives. In this study, autonomous and mobilized voting are used in relative terms, and mobilized voting in particular is limited to the above sense.

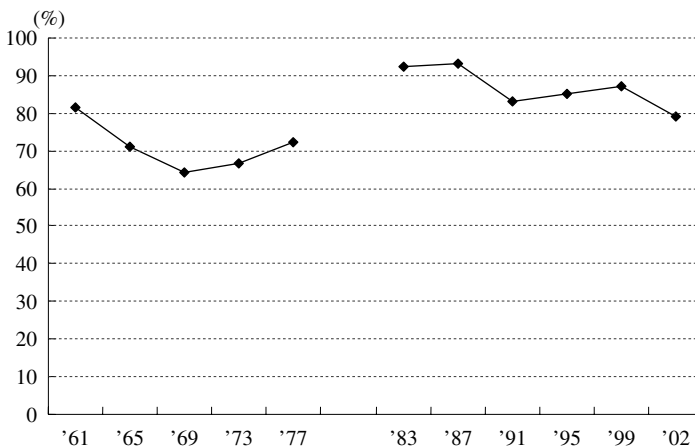
The main contention of this chapter is that electoral participation in Turkey over the last four decades has become more autonomous and less mobilized. What follows in this chapter is first an overview of voter turnout at the national level during the 1961–2002 period and an explanation of the major reasons for quantitative and qualitative changes in voter turnout. Second, the relationship between socioeconomic development and voter turnout is examined at the provincial level for the general elections during the above period. This is because Özbudun argued that a positive relationship between socioeconomic development and electoral participation in a province indicated autonomous participation whereas a negative relationship suggested mobilized participation. Third, in order to supplement the second inquiry, another indicator, party competition, is used to measure autonomous/mobilized participation at the sub-province level over time.

### 5.1. National Voter Turnout

Two major factors have influenced voter turnout in general elections in Turkey. First, turnout has tended to be higher in the post-1980 period than in the pre-1980 period (Figure 5-1). This is because the 1983 electoral law (Law No. 2839), passed on June 10, 1983, made voting compulsory. Article 63 of the law stipulates a fine, imposed by the sub-provincial election board chairman, on registered eligible voters who, without legitimate reason, do not participate in either the general election or the by-election of the parliament. Actually, the author was unable to come across any reports or personal remarks indicating that such fines had ever been levied. It is plausible, however, that the possibility, though very small, of being fined and the sense of obligation that the law generated among the voters induced voter turnout to be higher than in the pre-1980 period.

Second, however, there has been substantial variance in voter turnout from election to election, both for the periods before and since 1983. A surge in electoral participation seems to accompany a transition from military to civilian rule<sup>2</sup> or the incorporation of untapped voters into a party's constituency. In 1961, a general election was held for the first time since the 1960 military intervention (and the introduction of Turkey's most democratic 1961 constitution). During the election campaign, the newly created AP demanded a political amnesty for the convicted members of its predecessor, the DP, which had been dissolved by the military government. These factors probably raised popular interest in this election. The ensuing short-lived coalition governments most probably disappointed voters, particularly those in the middle class (Abadan and Yücekök 1967, p. 107), and national voter turnout declined.

Fig. 5-1. National Voter Turnout, 1961–2002



Source: Compiled by the author from Appendix III.

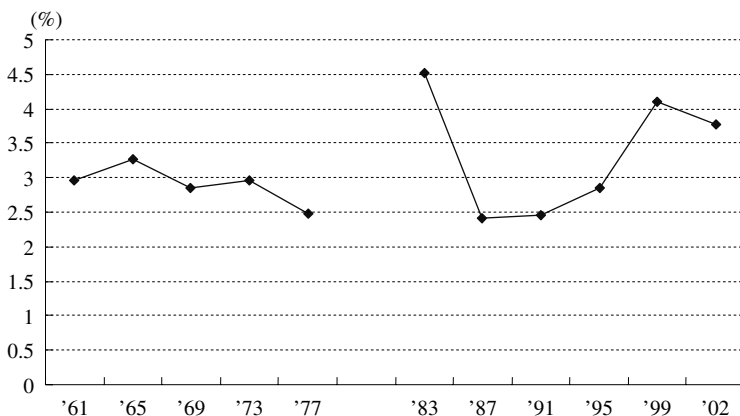
In 1972, the CHP chose a new leader, Bülent Ecevit. The party then consolidated its ideological shift to the center-left and became increasingly popular with the urban masses. The turnout increase between 1969 and 1973 was more significant in cities, where the CHP had strengthened its appeal, than in villages.<sup>3</sup> The 1983 general election was a transition election from the 1980–83 military government, although only three parties were allowed to participate. The 1987 election was the first competitive general election after the civilian transition in 1983. These pivotal elections produced higher voter turnout than did the other elections in the same period (either before 1983 or since 1983).

## 5.2. Invalid Votes

The introduction of compulsory voting in 1983 reduced the abstention rate. How, then, have former or potential nonvoters come to vote since then? Do they cast votes for parties or independent candidates? Or do they intentionally cast invalid votes? Figure 5-2 shows that for potential nonvoters, voting for a party is the norm while casting an invalid vote is contingent on political situations. Between the periods before and after the introduction of compulsory voting, the period-average rate of invalid votes to the total votes cast does not significantly differ. It is likely that most of the former nonvoters turned out and cast valid votes. Since 1983, however, the variance of invalid votes has been larger than in the previous period.<sup>4</sup>

The occurrence of invalid votes has become more dependent on the political context. The high rate of invalid votes in 1983 may well have reflected some voters' protest against the exclusion of all but three parties from the general election. In the 1995 and 1999 general elections, the growth of invalid votes coincided with heightened political distrust, as shown by the corruption perceptions index (Table 5-1).<sup>5</sup>

Fig. 5-2. Invalid Votes, 1961–2002



Source: Compiled by the author from Appendix III.

TABLE 5-1  
CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX FOR TURKEY, 1980–2003

	1980–85	1988–92	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
CPI	4.06	4.05	3.54	3.21	3.4	3.6	3.8	3.6	3.2	3.1

Source: Compiled by the author from the web site of the Internet Center for Corruption Research, accessible from <http://wwwuser.gwdg.de/~uwww/corruption.index.html>. This site is a joint initiative of the University of Passau and Transparency International.

Note: The corruption perceptions index (CPI) is a composite rank index generated from evaluations by businessmen and country specialists on the extent of corruption practices among public servants and politicians in a particular country. The higher the rank, the more serious the corruption.

Casting invalid votes, however, is not widespread. A change in the rate of invalid votes has contributed at most to about a 2-percentage-point change in the rate of voter turnout between consecutive elections.

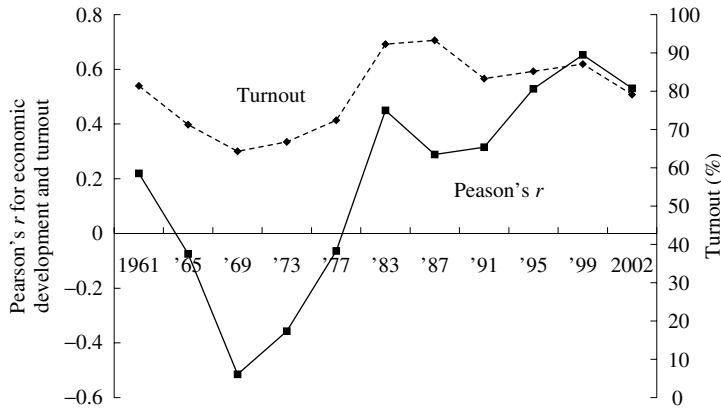
### 5.3. Relationship with Socioeconomic Development

The relationship between voter turnout and socioeconomic development changed significantly during the last four decades. The regular line in Figure 5-3 shows the relationship between provincial socioeconomic development and provincial voter turnout, and the broken line shows voter turnout at the national level. From 1961 to 1969, as already shown by Özbudun (1976), the relationship between socioeconomic development and voter turnout was either insignificant (1961 and 1965) or negative (1969 and 1973). Later, however, the relationship swung to the reverse. Since the 1980s, a positive relationship has been established, in which voter turnout is higher in the more developed than less developed regions.

Why, then, did the relationship between socioeconomic development and voter turnout at the provincial level change so dynamically? There are two major reasons. One is short-term and the other long-term. First, the above-mentioned relationship in the provinces depends on the level of national (or provincial-average) voter turnout. If national voter turnout is relatively high compared with other election years, the relationship between socioeconomic development and voter turnout in the provinces becomes positive and vice versa. This is due to different impacts of socioeconomic development on autonomous versus mobilized voting.

In general, autonomous voting is positively related with socioeconomic development. After reviewing elections in democracies, Lijphart (2000) concluded that higher socioeconomic status (in terms of income, wealth, and education) led to higher voting turnout (pp. 314–22). Franklin (1996) found that for 22 democracies, individual incomes were positively correlated with voting turnout. According to another study, the level of human development also explained the difference in voter turnout across countries, both democratic and non-democratic. The higher the value of the United Nation's Human Development Index (HDI), the higher the electoral participation in the country (IDEA 2002). For the United Kingdom, Parry, Moyser, and Day (1992)

Fig. 5-3. Voter Turnout and Autonomous Voting, 1961–2002



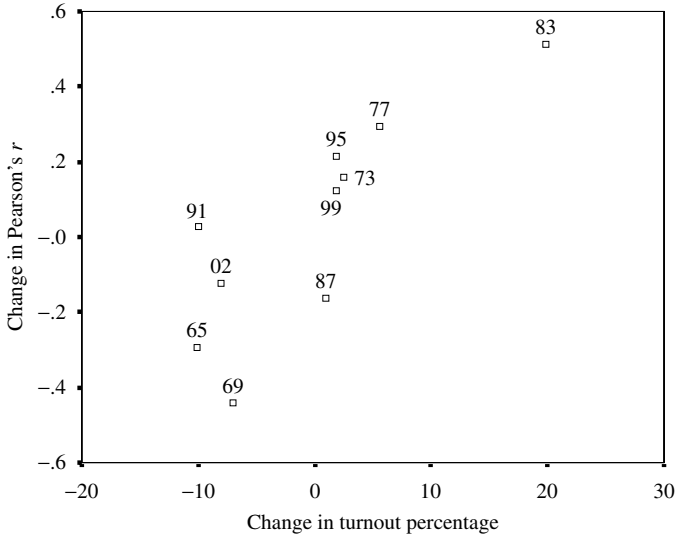
Sources: Calculated and compiled by the author from SIS (1988a, 1998b, 2000, 2003); Özötün (1988); State Planning Organization's website, accessible from <http://www.dpt.gov.tr/>.

Note: A positive correlation indicates that autonomous voting was prevalent across provinces. Correlation coefficients were statistically significant at the 0.05 level except for 1961, 1965, and 1977.

asserted that wealth increases voter turnout, based on the findings of a sample survey of nearly 1,600 people. Even in the apparently outlier case of Japan, where voting turnout is known to be higher in less developed constituencies, multiple regression analyses showed that it was the age of the voter, and not economic development (measured by the income level), that accounted for the higher voting rate in the less developed constituencies (Kabashima 1989). Similarly, Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies (1998) also pointed to more intense social networks in rural than urban sub-provinces in explaining the higher turnout among rural than urban voters in Japan.

In Turkey too, voter turnout in the (dominantly autonomous-voting)<sup>6</sup> cities has been positively correlated with socioeconomic development since the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> Since autonomous votes tend to vary between elections, they significantly affect *changes* in national voter turnout. Mobilized votes, on the other hand, are relatively predictable and do not vary significantly between elections. The proportion of autonomous votes to total votes tends to be high when national voter turnout is *high*, whereas the proportion of mobilized votes tends to be high when national turnout is *low*. Thus, high national voter turnout reflects higher/lower turnout in more/less developed regions while low national voter turnout represents higher/lower turnout in less/more developed regions.

Figure 5-3 and Figure 5-4 illustrate that contention. In Figure 5-3, the correlation coefficient between voter turnout and per capita GDP in provinces (the regular line) moves in tandem with the national voter turnout (the dotted line).<sup>8</sup> In this figure, however, each of the two variables is autocorrelated.<sup>9</sup> Figure 5-4 shows the relationship between the two variables with autocorrelation controlled for, by taking their first-order differences. The horizontal axis measures changes, between two consecu-

Fig. 5-4. Change in Turnout and Change in Pearson's  $r$ , 1965–2002 ( $N = 10$ )

Sources: Calculated by the author from the data for Figure 5-3.

Notes: 1. Change in Pearson's  $r$  between voter turnout and per capita

GDP at the provincial level:  $\Delta r_t = r_t - r_{t-1}$

2. Change in turnout percentage:  $\Delta v_t = v_t - v_{t-1}$

3. Labels show election years.

tive elections, in the correlation coefficient between voter turnout and per capita GDP at the provincial level. A plus change means that voting became more autonomous than in the previous election, and a minus means that voting became more mobilized than in the previous election. The vertical axis measures changes in the voter turnout percentage. It was confirmed that an increment in the correlation coefficient (between voter turnout and per capita GDP at the provincial level) was positively correlated with an increment in national voter turnout ( $r = 0.823, p < 0.01$ ).<sup>10</sup>

Admittedly, there was a clear break in the voting trend before and after 1983, and the introduction of compulsory voting in 1983 contributed to this change. In that year, the rate of autonomous votes to mobilized votes rose suddenly. This is because voter turnout increased due to the new participation of previous nonvoters. Although these new voters decided to take part in the election, in order to avoid fines, most of them were apparently not “mobilized” to vote for particular parties or candidates. Thus, while the reason for the increase in autonomous votes was institutional rather than behavioral, the net result was that mobilized voting became less prevalent.

The second reason is long-term social change, including urbanization<sup>11</sup> and rural development. Rapid urbanization since the 1960s led to a rise in the proportion of urban voter turnout to total provincial voter turnout. Urban voting behavior (represented by a positive relationship between voter turnout and socioeconomic development) thus increasingly shaped voting behavior in the province as a whole. Rural

TABLE 5-2  
URBAN AND RURAL VOTER TURNOUT, 1961–95

	1961	1965	1969	1973	1991	1995
Urban	74.6	66.2	56.3	62.7	81.6	81.8
Rural	83.2	77.3	68.1	69.4	87.2	86.1
Difference	-8.6	-11.1	-11.8	-6.7	-5.6	-4.3
Number of provinces	67	67	67	67	73	76

Sources: Compiled by the author; for 1961–73 from Özbudun (1976, 1980) and for 1991–95 from SIS (1992, 1996)

Note: For 1977, 1983, 1987, 1999, and 2002, the State Institute of Statistics did not show urban and rural voting turnout by province.

TABLE 5-3  
VOTER TURNOUT AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, URBAN VS. RURAL

	1969 <sup>a</sup>	1991	1995
Urban	0.213*	0.297**	0.426***
Rural	-0.452***	0.274**	0.531***
Province	-0.569***	0.388***	0.580***
Urban-rural gap	0.513***	0.129	0.146
Number of provinces	67	73	76

Sources: See Figure 5-3.

Notes: Entries are Pearson's correlation coefficients. Compiled electoral data for urban and rural constituencies were available for only these general elections.

<sup>a</sup> For per capita provincial income, the 1979 data were used.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*  $p < 0.10$ .

development brought about a continuing reduction in the political and economic influence of local notables. In the least developed regions such as southeastern Anatolia, the development of infrastructure and mass communication, especially since the beginning of the Southeastern Anatolian Project (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi, or GAP), weakened the tribal and feudalistic structure in the region.<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, the introduction of compulsory voting also added to voter turnout in the rural areas, though less significantly than in the urban areas. This presumably had the effect of increasing the rate of autonomous to mobilized votes.

The urban-rural difference in voter turnout also conforms to the above findings. Voter turnout used to be significantly higher in the rural than urban sub-province but this difference has shrunk considerably since the 1970s (Table 5-2). A possible reason is that when national voter turnout began to increase in the early 1970s, urban turnout accounted for most of it. Thus, this process has been a recovery in the significant decrease in urban turnout in the late 1960s. There was little room for a further increase in rural turnout, which remained stable at a high level. Another possibility is that rural voting behavior began to approximate urban voting behavior, as will be discussed later.



The long-term changes thus manifested themselves as a transformation of voting behavior in the rural area. For rural Turkey in the 1960s, Özbudun (1976) found a negative relationship between voter turnout and socioeconomic development. By the early 1990s, however, the relationship between the two variables had reversed. Table 5-3 shows that for 1991 and 1995 even in rural areas, voter turnout is positively correlated with socioeconomic development. Similarly, the urban-rural gap in voting turnout, which Özbudun referred to as an indication of mobilized voting, is no longer significantly correlated with socioeconomic development in the 1990s.

#### 5.4. Relationship with Party Competition

It would be desirable to confirm the above results at a lower level, such as the sub-provincial level. At this level, however, socioeconomic data is very difficult to come by. Instead, this section explores the relationship between *party competition* and voter turnout to look for evidence of autonomous/mobilized voting. Özbudun (1976, pp. 169–73) showed that in rural Turkey, single-party dominance in a village was often a sign of mobilized voting. It would be possible to apply the same logic to all sub-provinces nationwide to investigate the relationship between party competition and voter turnout over time. If *mobilized* voting is prevalent in the country, then high/low voter turnout should coincide with single-party/no dominance, or low/high party competition. If *autonomous* voting is prevalent, then high/low voter turnout should be observed with high/low party competition, which heightens/dampens voter interest.<sup>13</sup> It is thus assumed here that an association between high/low turnout and low/high party competition attests to the prevalence of mobilized voting, whereas an association between high/low turnout and high/low party competition indicates the prevalence of autonomous voting. When no statistically significant relationship exists between voter turnout and party competition, the mode of electoral participation is most probably an even mixture of mobilized and autonomous voting.

Table 5-4 shows that over the years, the relationship between party competition and voter turnout has changed from being negative to being statistically insignificant. In earlier years, sub-provinces with low competitiveness, or high one-party dominance, had high voter turnout. A large percentage of voters went to the polls presumably not so much because they were interested in the almost predetermined electoral results in

TABLE 5-4  
SINGLE-PARTY DOMINANCE AND VOTER TURNOUT BY SUB-PROVINCE, 1961–95

	1961	1965	1969	1973	1977	1983	1987	1991	1995
<i>r</i>	.123***	.080**	.077*	.264***	.245***	-.013	-.047	-.051	-.132***
<i>N</i>	636	637	638	638	638	640	646	894	918

Source: Calculated and compiled by the author from SIS (1998a, 1998b).

Note: Entries are Pearson's correlation coefficients between the voter turnout percentage and the squared percentage of votes cast for the largest party in the sub-province.

their sub-province, as because they felt obliged to vote for the dominant party in the sub-province. In sub-provinces where no dominant party could exert pressure on voters, they did not feel a strong urge to cast their ballots.

Since 1983, the relationship between voter turnout and party competition may seem inconclusive. There is, however, a clear trend toward a more autonomous voting pattern. The correlation coefficients are consistently negative and the strength of the correlation has increased for every new general election. Consequently, for the 1995 election the coefficient has become significant at the 0.01 level. As was stated just earlier, a sudden shift in the trend in 1983 was largely due to the introduction of compulsory voting. The fact remains, however, that compulsory voting generated a larger proportion of autonomous votes to total votes than in past elections. This growing weight of autonomous votes probably contributed to a tangible decline in mobilized voting.

## 5.5. Summary

This chapter has shown changes in electoral participation during the last four decades. Table 5-5 summarizes the major findings. First, in the long term, the level of national voter turnout was higher under compulsory voting after 1983 than in the previous two decades. In the short term, however, national voter turnout significantly varied between elections due to political factors, during both the former and the latter two decades.

Second, the *average* rate of invalid votes did not significantly differ between the periods before and after the introduction of compulsory voting, while the *variance* in the rate of invalid votes was greater after the introduction of compulsory voting than before. Now that voters have more difficulty resorting to abstention, invalid votes seem to more sensitively reflect voter distrust than in the 1960s and 1970s.

Third, the relationship between socioeconomic development and voter turnout at the provincial level depends on the level of national voter turnout. Low voter turnout,

TABLE 5-5  
SUMMARY OF ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN TURKEY, 1961–2002

Parameters	1961–77	1983–2002
National turnout	Low	High
Invalid votes	Stable	Unstable
Urban-rural difference in turnout <sup>a</sup>	Large	Small
Relationship with socioeconomic development: urban <sup>b</sup>	Positive	Positive
Relationship with socioeconomic development: rural <sup>b</sup>	Negative	Positive
Relationship with socioeconomic development: total	Negative	Positive
Relationship with party competition <sup>c</sup>	Negative	Positive

Source: Compiled by the author.

<sup>a</sup> Not tested for the 1980s.

<sup>b</sup> Not tested for the 1970s, the 1980s, 1999, and 2002.

<sup>c</sup> Not tested for 1999 and 2002.

often caused by voter disillusionment with the political system, reduces autonomous votes and consequently leads to an increase in the ratio of mobilized votes to total votes. High national voter turnout, due either to democratizing elections or to compulsory voting, leads to increased weight for autonomous voting. The pattern of rural electoral participation came, by the 1990s, to closely approximate that of urban electoral participation, in which greater socioeconomic development induces higher voter turnout. Similarly, the urban-rural difference in voter turnout has diminished over the last two decades, pointing to a decline in mobilized voting in rural areas.

Lastly, the relationship between party competition at the sub-province level and voter turnout provided complementary supportive evidence for a change in electoral participation from mobilized voting to autonomous voting. In the pre-1980 period, single-party dominance at the sub-province level led to greater voter turnout. In the post-1980 period, this relationship disappeared. Most recently, the more competitive sub-provinces stimulated greater turnout than did the less competitive sub-provinces.

## Notes

- 1 Also, see the review of their studies in Section 2.2 of Chapter 2.
- 2 In general, the first two or three elections after democratization produce high electoral turnout (Lijphart 2000, p. 316).
- 3 Voting turnout rose by 6.4 percentage points in the cities but by only 1.3 percentage points in the villages. At the same time, the CHP increased its votes by 8.8 percentage points in the cities, compared to 3.2 percentage points in the villages. See Özbudun (1980, p. 116, Table 5.2).
- 4 Before voting became compulsory, the rate of invalid votes was gradually declining, presumably because a learning effect was reducing errors in voting. The same kind of errors, however, cannot account for the greater volatility of the rate of invalid votes since 1983.
- 5 The major political scandals in the 1990s started with the İSKİ (Istanbul Municipality Water Administration) affair in the early 1990s. Later, corruption charges against former Prime Minister Tansu Çiller after 1995 and the Susurluk affair in 1996 further revealed to the public the prevalence and depth of political corruption in Turkey.
- 6 Nuhurat (1971) reported that mobilized voting was observed only in the villages.
- 7 Özbudun (1976) analyzed voter turnout by city size but did not find any significant relationship. Baykal's data (1970) imply such a possibility but did not go through a test of statistical significance.
- 8 For socioeconomic development, the only time-series data available at the provincial level were for per capita GDP. A better indicator of socioeconomic development would be the Human Development Index defined by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In the case of 1995, for which those data were available, the provincial rank (with 1 being the highest) in the Human Development Index was more strongly associated with voter turnout in the province ( $r = -0.676$ ) than was per capita income in the province ( $r = 0.529$ ). These results corroborate the assertion in this section that in the 1990s, socioeconomic development at the provincial level was positively related to voter turnout.
- 9 Voter turnout at time  $t$  was positively correlated with voter turnout at time  $t - 1$ . Likewise, the correlation coefficient between voter turnout and socioeconomic development at the

provincial level at time  $t$  was positively correlated with the same correlation coefficient at time  $t - 1$ .

- 10 The original autocorrelation was almost completely eliminated, with the Durbin-Watson test statistic being 2.030.
- 11 In this context, urbanization constitutes one aspect of socioeconomic development and refers solely to a rise in the proportion of the urban to rural population. Urbanization is assumed to make the urban type of (autonomous) voting more prevalent across the nation simply because it increases the proportion of urban population in the country.
- 12 The tribal and feudal structures of the Kurd-populated region appear to be in decline due to the development of infrastructure and the mass media, especially after the realization of the Southeastern Anatolian Project. Political instability in the region since the 1980s also contributed to a virtual superiority of the villagers over the landlords. Some lands are under peasants' control while others are being sold to peasants at a low price (Adnan 1999, p. 129). In Southeastern Anatolia, "the traditional forms of land ownership, land tenure and labor organization have been transformed into more widespread ownership in the villages by resident farmers using more advanced agricultural technology" (Akşit et al. 1996, p. 59). Dogu Ergil, who prepared the report "Doğu sorunu" [Eastern problem], published in 1995 by the Turkish Union of Chambers and Exchanges, asserted that in the Kurd-populated region, feudal relationships no longer existed in a practical sense. According to Ergil, *ağalık*, or Kurdish lordship, does not only mean large land ownership but also rests on the comprehensive power to sanction a large section of society. He wrote that large landownership still existed but that it had become difficult for landowners to exert punitive power over the peasants (*Nokta*, Sept. 21–27, 1997, p. 9).
- 13 Indeterminate electoral competition increases voter perception of their importance in deciding the electoral outcome.

